



TOK VISITORS CENTER

ALASKA

PUBLIC LANDS INFORMATION CENTER

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION & PUBLIC FACILITIES • ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF
ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT • DEPARTMENT OF ALASKA FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

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VOLUME 1.



Tok Information Center Location Study

I Executive Summary

Study Scope and Process

This study begins the process of planning, designing, and constructing a new Alaska Highway/Alaska Public Lands Information Center and associated Rest Area in the Tok vicinity. This study was sponsored by the Alaska Departments of Transportation and Public Facilities, Economic and Community Development, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The purpose has been to determine:

- those activities which may be accommodated in the facility,
- the anticipated size of both the facility and its site, and
- potential locations/sites within the Tok vicinity which could accommodate this facility.

The planning process included data gathering meetings and discussions with the agencies which might occupy the facility, with potential users (visitor services providers), and members of the Tok community.

Consideration has been given to co-locating with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters facility, since the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, which Fish & Wildlife manages, is an important increment of the public lands in the region. The concept for this co-location is "one site, two roofs." Using this approach, separate federal funds for Fish & Wildlife Service facility construction will be required. The approach adopted for this project is to assure that sufficient land is available on or adjacent to the Alaska Public Lands Information Center site for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters facility.

Results

Currently, it is anticipated that the area of the Alaska Public Lands Information Center will be on the order of 9,500 –10,000 square feet and will require a site of approximately 5 acres. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters facility will require an additional one and one half acres for a total site of six and one half acres.

As part of the site evaluation process, a dozen or more locations and sites were evaluated, and three candidate locations identified. Both Sites A and B aggregate two separate parcels which are owned by different private entities. Site C is owned by the State of Alaska Mental Health Trust, which requires fair market compensation for use of its properties.

Next Steps

This study only represents an initial step and provides the initial concept of facility requirements and site options. It lays important groundwork needed to secure commitments for future funding for construction, staffing, facility operations and maintenance. Once agency agreements are reached and funding commitments secured, the concepts in this study can move forward. This project provides an opportunity to develop a showcase visitor facility in the Tok area that provides lasting benefits not only to travelers, but also to the Tok community and all state residents.



II Introduction

General

The Alaska Public Lands Information Centers (APLIC) were designated to be developed as part of Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) legislation passed in the 1980s. The State of Alaska was designated to manage the Public Lands Information Center in Tok. The Center in Ketchikan is managed and operated by the United States Forest Service. The Centers in Anchorage and Fairbanks are managed and operated by the National Park Service. The State of Alaska, through the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities and the Department of Community and Economic Development, currently have funding available to pursue site selection and facility programming for this project. The State has made a preliminary commitment for an "Alaska Highway APLIC and Rest Area" project design funding using Federal Department of Transportation funds.

Public Lands Information Centers are necessarily multi-agency programs, since public lands in Alaska fall under several federal and state jurisdictions. In the case of Tok, the principal federal agencies include the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, who manage the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge, and the Bureau of Land Management who manage the federal land in the Forty Mile country, as well as the wild and scenic rivers in this region. State agencies include the Department of Community and Economic Development, the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Fish and Game.



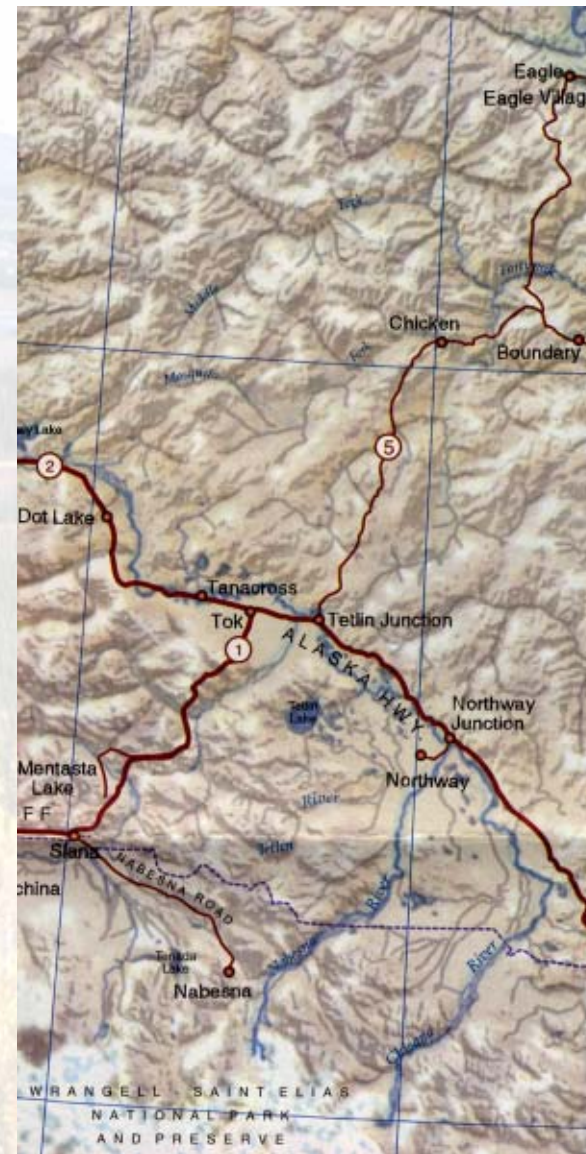
Given that the operations and services of the Alaska Public Lands Information Center in Tok will be a multi-agency activity, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has been a strong advocate for this project and has provided strong support to its development. Additionally, Fish & Wildlife plans to construct new headquarters within the next several years. Given this agency's current and future active involvement in the project, they have decided to explore co-locating USFWS headquarters at the site for the new APLIC, utilizing a one-site, two-roofs concept.

Finally an important component of this project will be the inclusion of a highway rest area. This rest area will serve highway travelers, in conjunction with the APLIC.

Scope of Study

The current study is directed at determining the scope and size of the project, reviewing the range of potential sites in Tok which may be available, establishing site evaluation criteria, meeting with the community to discuss both available sites and the selection criteria, and evaluating the candidate sites to develop a short list of potential locations.

Upon completion of this study, it is anticipated that the Alaska Department of Transportation will begin final site selection and project design.





Public Involvement

Public meetings were held in Tok on November 1, 2001, and January 14, 2002.¹ Meetings were announced through notice in the Mukluk News and flyers posted in Tok. Notice was mailed directly to people who had attended a previous public meeting regarding the project. Information about the project was also provided to the public through Mukluk News articles (November 15, 2001; February 7, 2002;² March 7, 2002), project updates and handouts distributed at the APLIC and the Tok public library, and on the DCED web site.³ Public comment was welcomed throughout the project and written comment forms were provided at the public meetings and on the web to facilitate public comment. Written public comment is summarized in Appendix B.

Since initiating the project in October 2000, cooperating agencies have also spoken with representatives of Native communities and organizations in the region about where to locate the facility, Native-owned land that might be suitable for the facility, and the potential to coordinate with a cultural center. Contacts have included Tetlin Village, Tanacross Village, Tanacross Inc., and the Tanana Chiefs Conference.

The November 2001 and January 2002 public meetings are summarized briefly below. More detailed summaries, meeting agendas and attendance lists are included in Appendix A.



¹ Cooperating agencies also held a public meeting in Tok on October 25, 2000, to begin discussion about the project.

² February 7, 2002, commentary in Mukluk News written by Glen Marunde, Tok resident.

³ www.dced.state.ak.us/cbd/toubus/tok.htm

November 1, 2001, Public Meeting

The project was introduced and the public identified issues to address during facility programming and site evaluation. Participants generally discussed the functions and best location for the facility, including:

- whether it would be best to co-locate the state and federal functions into one facility, or to have separate facilities in Tok,
- potential for co-locating with a Native cultural center,
- whether the facility should be readily visible from the Alaska Highway, or screened to be a more aesthetic, natural setting,
- the effects of the new facility on land and business development adjacent to the selected site.

The group discussed potential sites. There was general preference for a location within walking distance of central Tok, east of the Alaska/Glenn Highway junction. A representative of the Tok Community Umbrella Corporation (TCUC) stated that it is TCUC's position that the log community building is not available for use by this facility.

January 14, 2002, Public Meeting

The consultant team presented preliminary information about the facility program, site acreage requirements, site evaluation criteria, and candidate sites for the facility. There was agreement at the meeting that the new visitor and welcome center should be located in or near the center of Tok, within one half mile from the Alaska/Glenn Highway junction. This will be most convenient for pedestrians and short-stop visitors, allow for collaboration with the Main Street Visitor Center, and facilitate community use.





Some participants favored remodeling the current APLIC, using the log community building, or constructing a new building in the community greenbelt adjacent to the APLIC. Others favored using a larger site that would allow for co-locating the visitor center and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administrative headquarters, and provide for some outdoor interpretive features. TCUC and library representatives continued to state their opposition to use of the log community building.

The consultant team described sites along the Alaska Highway east of the junction that would be large enough (> 6.5 acres) to co-locate the facilities and accommodate outdoor interpretive use. There are sites owned by the Alaska Mental Health Land Trust Office and Tanacross Inc., that could accommodate the facilities.

Resources

Information necessary for this project came from an array of sources including:

- Agency meeting notes and data collected in discussions about this project. This information included detailed program, function, and budget information from both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management.
- Tanacross Inc. lands information officers
- Alaska Department of Natural Resources
- Alaska Mental Health Land Trust Office
- Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

- Alaska Division of Tourism, Department of Community and Economic Development
- Tok Alaska Public Lands Information Center
- Interviews with tourism businesses in the Tok area.
- Consultation with public agencies in the community of Tok and the region.
- Tok Community Umbrella Corporation
- Private land owners
- Maps and aerial photos
- Surveys
- Site Visits



III Facility Program

A "facility program" identifies who are the facility users, what activities will take place in the facility, and estimates the interior and exterior space needs and areas required to support each of these activities. The result is a tabulation of spaces, areas, and some narrative describing the facility. From this program document, it is possible to provide a rough budget of facility costs, as well as begin preliminary design. A copy of the Tok APLIC facility program is attached in the appendices.

The principal role of the new Tok APLIC will be to provide public land and traveler information, rest and comfort facilities for Alaska residents and visitors. Interpretive exhibits with interactive media presentations will provide a general overview of public lands in Alaska, with an emphasis on the federal and state lands in the borderlands region. These exhibits and presentations will address the natural, cultural, political, and economic history of these lands, current status, and public recreational resources available. Specific interpretive displays and presentations will describe the attributes of the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge.

An area for trip planning will be available, with a library/collection of map and land status resources available which can be used to assist users in determining where they might like to go and what they can expect to see and do.

Space Description	Component Area	
Visitors Center		
Basic Building Area	9,652 sf	
Site Area Basic	87,156 sf	2.00 acres
Site Area w/ Interpretive Trails	217,836 sf	5.00 acres
USFS Headquarters Facility		
Offices	8,505 sf	
Garage & Warehouse	6,586 sf	
Site Area	63,304 sf	1.45 acres
Cumulative Basic Site Area	150,460 sf	3.45 acres
Cumulative Site Area w/ Interpretive Trail	281,140 sf	6.45 acres
Option		



Visitor contact stations will be provided where visitors can ask questions and get assistance. In the case of Tok, visitors will also be able to make reservations on the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Staff and administrative offices will be provided, as well as visitor support services, including restrooms and telephones.

The Tok APLIC will include a 200-seat theater that will support several tour busses at once, as well as provide a location for community events.

The estimated area of this facility is approximately 9,700 square feet.

With respect to site requirements, an outdoor rest area is planned as a safe and pleasant place for highway travelers and their children to stop, take a stroll, have a snack or meal, and use the visitor services facilities in the APLIC.

An interpretive trail is planned, along with visitor parking, tour bus and staff parking. It would be most appropriate if the site is reasonably well forested and that this natural landscape would be preserved. Total anticipated site area for the APLIC is five acres.

The current anticipated construction cost for the facility as programmed is \$3 million. This covers building construction cost only and does not include any costs for site acquisition, design, exhibit design and construction, project management, or costs of fixtures furnishings or equipment.



WILDLIFE OF THE REGION

A program for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters facility was also developed, utilizing information previously generated by the Tetlin Refuge Manager and Fish & Wildlife Service, Alaska Region staff. The facility will be comprised of several structures, including an office building at 8,500 square feet, garage and warehouse at 6,600 square feet. The estimated additional site area for these functions is 1.45 acres, including staff and agency vehicle parking.

At present, federal funding will not be available to construct the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters for several years; however, under the one-site, two-roofs concept, the project site area requirements have been established to allow for this future development.

Site Evaluation Criteria

Site evaluation criteria were developed in consultation with the Tok community, Native interests in the region, visitor service and other businesses operating in the area, cooperating agencies, and the public.

The highest priority objectives that emerged from this consultation were to find a site that would be:

- Larger than 6.5 acres – which is large enough to house both an APLIC/Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center and a Fish and Wildlife Service administrative facility (“one-site, two-roofs”), with outdoor interpretive features and room for future expansion.
- Within one half mile of the highway junction to be most convenient for pedestrians and “short stop” visitors.
- Near existing visitor services and potential sites for a future Native cultural center.
- Conducive to shared community use.
- Supportive of existing businesses.
- Suitable for outdoor interpretation features (e.g., short trails).





These highest priority objectives became the “Tier 1” and “Tier 2” site evaluation criteria (see inset on page 8). To be considered, sites must satisfy the 6.5 acre size threshold set by the Tier 1 criteria. Sites that are not 6.5 acres or more were removed from further consideration. The Tier 2 criteria were used to judge which of the potential sites would best fulfill the priority purposes and need for the facility. “Tier 3” criteria examine potential impediments which may hinder development of the sites that were under serious consideration.

Selecting a General Area for the Facility

The Tier 1 and Tier 2 criteria were initially used by the consultant team to determine which of five general areas in or near Tok would be the best location for the facility. These general areas are:

- East of Tok, on the Alaska Highway (7-10 miles from highway junction)
- East “edge” of Tok, on the Alaska Highway (1-2 miles from highway junction)
- Center of Tok, on/near the Alaska Highway
- Tok Cut-Off, near the Alaska Highway
- West of Tok junction, on the Alaska Highway

Results of Tier 1 Evaluation

Each of the five general areas satisfied the 6.5 acre “size threshold” of the Tier 1 criteria. There were candidate sites in each of the five general areas that were larger than the 6.5 acres needed to house the APLIC/Refuge Visitor Center and the Fish and Wildlife Service administrative facility.

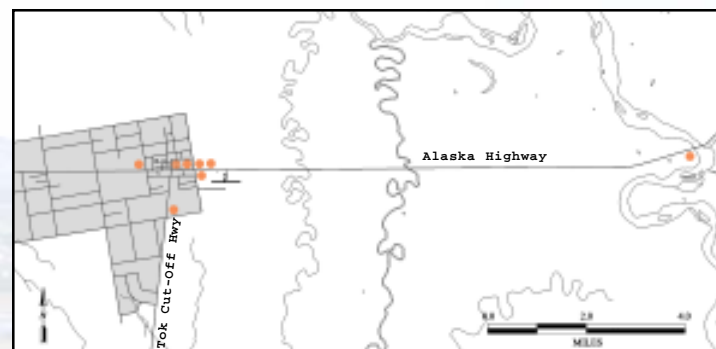


Results of Tier 2 Evaluation

The Tier 2 evaluation of the five general areas indicated that locations in the center of Tok, on or near the Alaska Highway, best satisfied the Tier 2 criteria. Sites in the center of Tok would be convenient for pedestrians and close to other visitor services, conducive to community use, and an asset to existing businesses. There are also sites in this area that are aesthetic and suitable for outdoor interpretation features.

The other four general areas were removed from further consideration because they did not meet the Tier 2 criteria, for the following reasons:

- East of Tok, on the Alaska Highway (7-10 miles from highway junction): Removed from further consideration because it is not convenient for pedestrians and “short stop” visitors, has minimal opportunity for collaboration with existing visitor services in Tok, and has potential to distract visitors from existing Tok businesses.
- East “Edge” of Tok on Alaska Highway (1-2 miles from highway junction): Removed from further consideration because it is less convenient for pedestrians (more than one half mile from junction), and potential sites are less aesthetic and less suitable for outdoor interpretation features.
- Tok Cut-Off: Removed from consideration because it was not on the route of all highway travelers through Tok, not visible from the Alaska Highway, and potential sites are less aesthetic and less suitable for outdoor interpretation features.
- West of Tok Junction: Removed from consideration because it was not on the route of all highway travelers through Tok.



TOK VICINITY MAP





The results of the evaluation are illustrated in Appendix C. A draft of this site evaluation matrix was distributed to the cooperating agencies and the public, posted on the State Department of Community and Economic Development web site, and discussed at the January 2002 public meeting in Tok.

Candidate Sites in the Center of Tok

Having narrowed the field to sites in the center of Tok, the consultant team evaluated six candidate sites in this area against the Tier 1 and Tier 2 site evaluation criteria.

Three of the six sites were removed from further consideration because they did not meet Tier 1 or Tier 2 criteria, for the following reasons:

- Adjacent to Forty Mile Air at Tok Airport:
Tier 1: Satisfied 6.5 acre “size threshold” (site is approximately 10 acres)
Tier 2: Removed from further consideration because the site is developed for commercial/industrial use and is less aesthetic and less suitable for outdoor interpretive features than other sites
- Community greenbelt on Alaska Highway (near existing APLIC)
Tier 1: Removed from further consideration because site is less than the 6.5 acres needed to house the facilities and desired outdoor uses.
Other considerations: Remodeling the existing APLIC for the new visitor center is not feasible – the quality and functional layout is not suitable for the new visitor center; parking is inadequate; existing agencies occupying the facility would be required to relocate.

Tier 1 Criteria

- A. Site Acreage: 6.5+ acres, to house APLIC and FWS facilities, with outdoor features

Tier 2 Criteria

- B. Visitor Access and Convenience: on route of highway travelers, visible from Alaska Highway, within one half mile of highway junction – to be most convenient for pedestrians, convenient to other visitor services
- C. Community Collaboration: potential for community use, collaboration with visitor services and Native cultural center, affect on private businesses
- D. Aesthetics and Interpretation: attractiveness, suitability for outdoor interpretation

Tier 3 Criteria

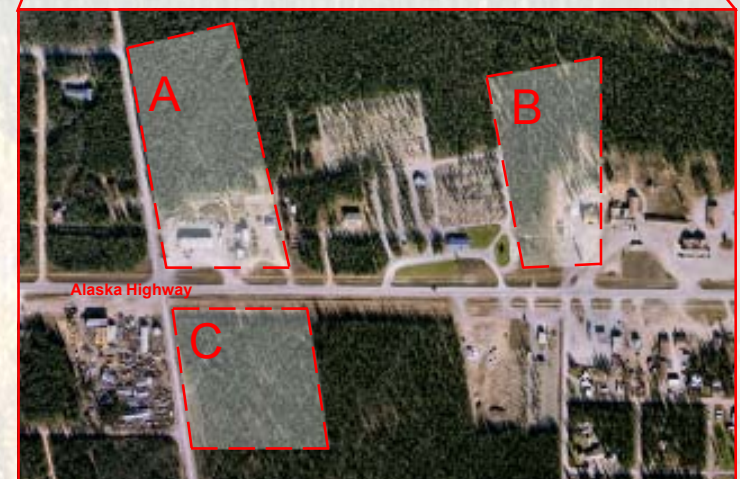
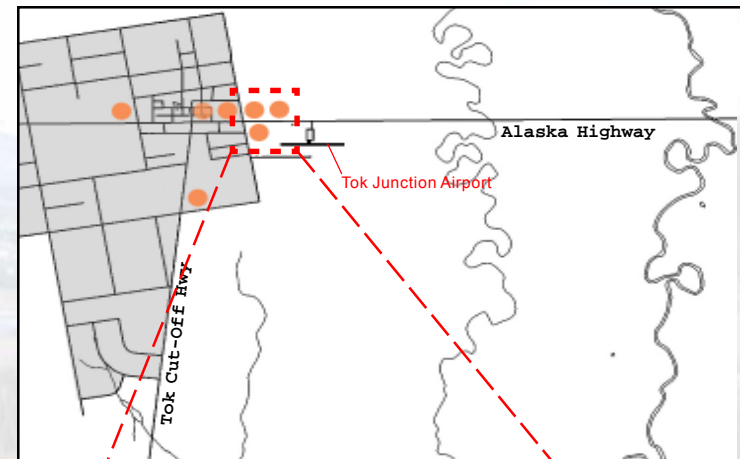
- E. Land Management Issues: compatibility with land use and regulations, potential to satisfy ANCSA Sec. 1306
- F. Environmental, Utilities and Security: wetlands, permitting, traffic, utilities, security
- G. Agency Considerations: project cost, staff commute or relocation

- Existing community log building
Tier 1: Removed from further consideration because site is less than the 6.5 acres needed to house the facilities and desired outdoor uses.
Other considerations: Conversion of the existing log building into an APLIC visitor center is not feasible due to insufficient building area, inadequate parking, and no room for expansion. TCUC has taken the position that the log community building is not available for use by this facility.

Recommended Sites

Three sites in the center of Tok are recommended as most suitable for the new facility. These are:

1. Tanacross "A" Site: Junction of Fifth Street and Alaska Highway, North of the Alaska Highway. This site has 410 feet of frontage on the Alaska Highway and is 895 feet deep, for a total area of 8.5 acres.
2. Tanacross "B" Site: North of the Alaska Highway, approx. three quarter mile east of the Alaska/ Glenn Highway junction. This irregularly shaped site has approximately 390 feet of frontage along the Alaska Highway, and is an average of 450 feet wide by 855 feet deep, for a total area of 9 acres.
3. Alaska Mental Health Trust (AMHT) "C" Site: Junction of D Street and Alaska Highway, South of the Alaska Highway. The parcel selected from this 25 acre block has 550 feet of Alaska Highway frontage, and is 550 feet deep, for a total area of 7 acres.



RECOMMENDED SITES



These sites each satisfy the 6.5 acre “size threshold” of the Tier 1 criteria. They are each large enough to house an APLIC/Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center and a Fish and Wildlife Service administrative center (“one site, two roofs”), with outdoor interpretive features and room for future expansion.

The sites also satisfy the Tier 2 criteria. They are on the route of all highway travelers through Tok (east of the Alaska/Glenn highway junction). The Tanacross “A” site and AMHT “C” site are within one half mile of the highway junction, which is convenient for pedestrians and “short stop” visitors.

Their central location in Tok maximizes the opportunity to collaborate with other visitor information services and for community use of the facility. The two Tanacross sites offer the possibility of co-location with a Native cultural center in the future, and implement provisions of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act which supports locating the Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge facilities on Native land.¹

As a final step, the consultant team evaluated these three sites against Tier 3 criteria (see inset on page 8 and Appendix C). There are no apparent environmental, utility, security or other considerations that would make the sites unsuitable. However, it is recommended that soil and groundwater at the sites be tested for potential contamination from adjacent uses.

SITE “A”



SITE “B”



SITE “C”



¹ ANILCA, Sec. 1306.

Site Utilization Diagrams

In order to demonstrate that each of the candidate sites would adequately serve the needs of the new APLIC, site development diagrams have been developed for each of the candidate sites.

The following diagrams indicate generally the size and relative location of each of the respective elements of the facility program including:

- Rest area
- APLIC and associated bus drop-off zone and private vehicle parking
- Future location of Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters facilities, including parking, office, warehouse, and vehicle storage yard.
- Interpretive trails

These diagrams represent one of several development possibilities for each site. The final configuration and organization of each site will be developed during the facility design phase of the project.





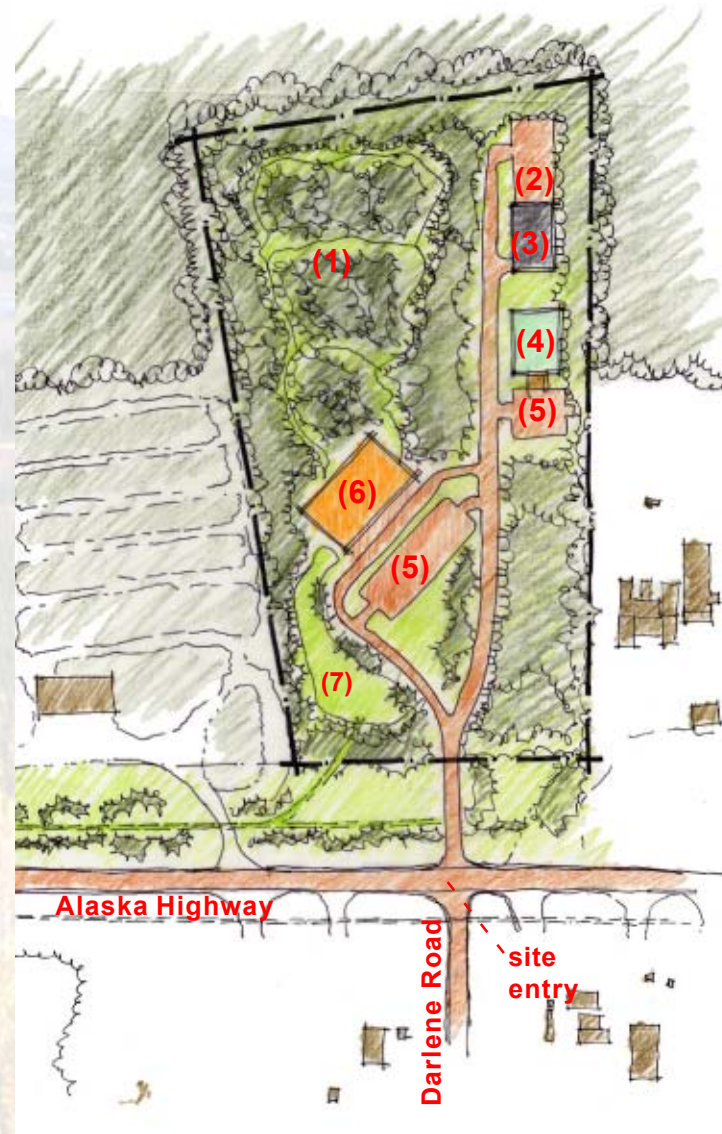
Tanacross “A” Site: Junction of Fifth Street and Alaska Highway, North of the Alaska Highway	
Landowner	Tanacross, Inc. other private owners
Acreage	8.5 acres (Roughly 6.5 acres for facility, 5.7 acres for access)
Location	One half mile east of highway junction
Assets	(1) forested land, aesthetic outdoor setting (2) pedestrian trails through community greenbelt could connect from Main Street Visitor Center to this site (3) trails from this site could continue on undeveloped land toward Tok River (4) with USFWS HQ, would implement ANILCA Section 1306 (5) potential co-location with future Native cultural center
Considerations or Detriments	(1) would require purchase of privately-owned parcel for highway frontage and access (2) requires purchase of more acreage than is needed for facility, to secure access (3) need mechanism to protect facility from adjacent incompatible development (4) potential groundwater contamination from adjacent properties should be investigated



SITE “A”

(1) interpretive trails, (2) vehicle storage, (3) warehouse, (4)USFWS` headquarters, (5) parking, (6) APLIC, (7) Rest Area

Tanacross “B” Site: North of Alaska Highway, approx. three quarter mile east of junction	
Landowner	Tanacross, Inc. other private owners
Acreage	9.0 acres (Roughly 6.5 acres for facility, 4.15 acres for access)
Location	Three quarter mile east of highway junction
Access	Would require obtaining privately-owned parcel (“Husky parcel”) to provide adequate highway frontage for access
Assets	(1) forested land, aesthetic outdoor setting (2) trails from this site could continue on undeveloped land toward Tok River (3) implements ANILCA Section 1306 (4) potential co-location with future Native cultural center
Considerations or Detriments	(1) would require purchase of privately-owned parcel for highway frontage and access (2) requires purchase of more acreage than is needed for facility, to secure access (3) need mechanism to protect facility from adjacent incompatible development (4) potential groundwater contamination from adjacent properties should be investigated

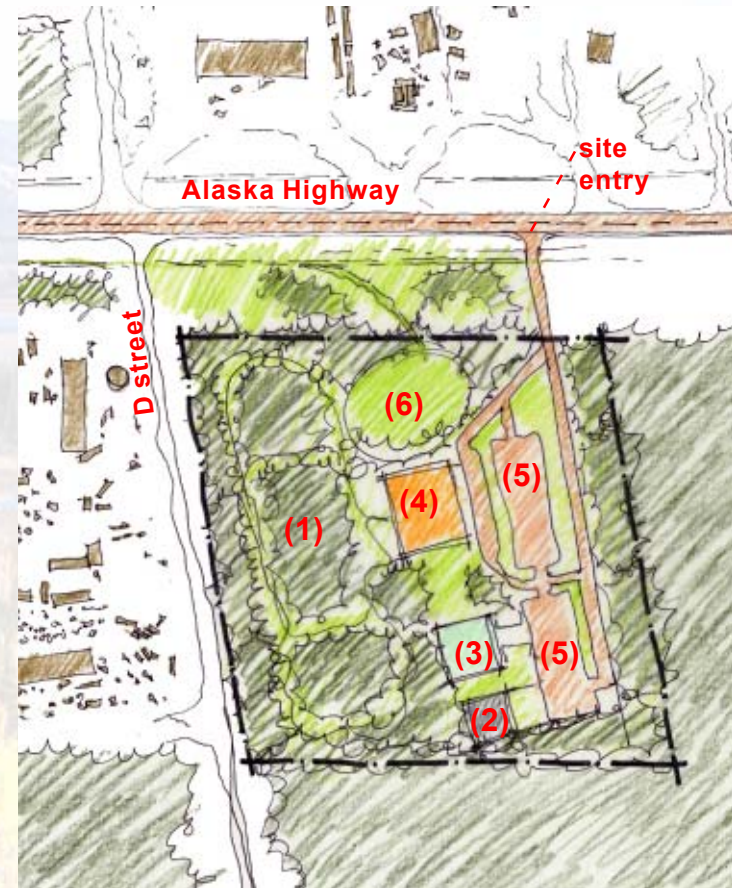


SITE “B”

(1) interpretive trails, (2) vehicle storage, (3) warehouse, (4) USFWS headquarters, (5) parking, (6) APLIC, (7) Rest Area



Alaska Mental Health Trust “C” Site: Junction of D Street and Alaska Highway, South of the Alaska Highway	
Landowner	Alaska Mental Health Land Trust
Acreage	9.0 acres
Location	One half mile east of highway junction, on Alaska Highway
Access	Alaska Highway frontage; site is on pedestrian path
Assets	(1) highway frontage (2) pedestrian trails through forested land, aesthetic outdoor setting (3) pedestrian trails through community greenbelt could connect from Main Street Visitor Center to this site
Considerations or Detriments	(1) need to retain screening from incompatible development on D Street (to west). Proximity to Airport may increase noise on site (2) potential groundwater contamination from adjacent properties should be investigated



SITE “C”

(1) interpretive trails, (3) USFWS headquarters, (4) APLIC
(5) parking, (6) Rest Area

IV Next Steps

This study only represents an initial step in the process of constructing a new Alaska Public Lands Information Center in the Tok area. A critical element in making future decisions is agreement among the participating agencies regarding their roles and responsibilities in the design, construction, and operation of this facility.

This study provides our initial concept of facility requirements and site options. It lays important groundwork needed to secure commitments for future funding for construction, staffing and facility operations and maintenance. As the primary occupant and manager of the APLIC facility, the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development needs to thoroughly review the outlined program and space needs. The proposed project represents a significant increase in annual operating and maintenance costs.

Once an agency agreement is reached and funding commitments secured, the concepts in this study can move forward. It is possible that during the process of negotiating agency agreements, the concepts envisioned in this study may need to be altered.

At this point, the project will then move to the design stage, where the facility concepts will be finalized and the final site selection will be made. The Department of Transportation and Public Facilities currently has funding approved to begin this work. Funding for site acquisition is currently expected to be available in 2003. Funding for construction is now tentatively scheduled for 2005.

Tok is the primary gateway for highway travelers entering Alaska. This project provides an opportunity to develop a showcase visitor facility in the Tok area that provides lasting benefits not only to those travelers, but also to the Tok community and all state residents.





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APPENDICES (Volume II)

A) Public Meetings

- a. November Meeting
- b. January Meeting
- c. Summary of Written Public Comment

B) Evaluation Matrix

C) Facility Program Document







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